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A Comparative Analysis of the Social Divide and Political Participation

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A comparative Analysis of the Social Divide Political Participation in East Asia

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The on-going political crisis in Thailand timely reminds us how fragile young democracies can become when the push comes to shove. Most East Asian young and emerging democracies suffer from politics of polarization to some extent, including Mongolia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. In a broader context, this problem has become epidemic as riot police trying to ward off angry demonstrators in Ukraine and Turkey.

We will describe in each country the main social cleavage and how political parties are aligned with the cleavage. We will then seek to examine the factors shaping political participation across East Asian countries. East Asia is such a heterogeneous region. The levels of political development are rather different across the region. The geographic and economic proximity to China is also rather different. The extent of ethnic fractionalization is also rather different across the region. These factors all have significant influence on the issue and of extent of party competition. Specifically, we find three factors particular important that are pertain to East Asia. These factors include the rise of China, regime preference, and ethnic heterogeneity. Moreover, social cleavage does not necessarily translate into political competition. We will discuss to what extent social division affect the functioning of democracy. In the last section we will explore the institutional designs that may moderate the tensions.

Table 1 demonstrates in each East Asian country the main political parties and social cleavages. As seen, the picture is quite complex and heterogeneous. Like many countries in other region class is an important issue in several countries in the region. Second, the demand for political reform is also clear in the hybrid regimes. Moreover, one can easily find that ethnic based social division is important in several countries. We will explore these dimensions by putting things into comparative perspective. In

addition to the these factor, the issues of the Right of Collective Self-Defense in Japan, North Korea problem in South Korea, Political and economic relationships between China and Taiwan, and issues of Double General Elections and Economic relationships with China in Hong Kong all seem to point to another important factor: the political and economic proximity to China. The rise of China in the past two decades greatly shaped not only the relations between it and its neighbors but also the domestic political and social cleavages of its neighbors. In many instances, this development triggers or aggravates the social divisions. In the following sections, we will explore income inequality, the China factor, ethnic heterogeneity, and some of the institution designs in turn.

<Table 1 about here>

Income Inequality

The first factor shaping the region is the rising income inequality in this region. This is a trend that swept different regions of the world and East Asia cannot escape the trend either. In several East Asian countries, for a long time social class was an important factor influenced national politics in 1950s to 1960s because of the increased international influence of the USSR (Hewison and Rodan 2012). In 1970s, the Left struggled with the Rightist and their military forces in Southeast Asia. During 1980s, while elite-controlled political power successfully suppressed the Left and their demand for democratic transition in some Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, class in South Korea and Taiwan gave impetus to social movements which led to democratization in the two countries (Hsiao and Koo 1997). After 1997-1998 economic crisis in Asia, pro-poor and anti-poverty policies were welcomed by vast electors and made Joseph Estrada in the Philippines

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(De Castro 2007) and Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand rise (Phongpaichit and Baker 2012). Then the two political leaders were opposed by middle classes and business group (Hewison and Rodan 2012, Albritton and Thawilwadee 2008). In the past few years, the clash of right-wing and left-wing movements has made class struggle as the major element in Thai politics.

After democratization, the 1987 constitution of the Philippines sets term limit for election to the members of the Congress (three-term limit on the Representative and two-term limit on the Senator.) The aim of this special limit is to hinder oligarchic elites, such as landlords or heads of local notable family, from dominating Pilipino politics. However, the elite can remain their political career by running for members of different Chamber, reducing the effect of the law.

In Thailand, the red-shirt and yellow-shirt movement clash is an on-going conflict in the new democracies. The clash is so serious which induce the upper-middle class in the capital to give up the democratic procedures and institutions. The Single-District Two-Votes System brought a strong and one-party administration in 2005. In 2007 Constitution, the single member constituencies were replaced by the multi-member constituencies system to lower the influence of a single Pro-Thaksin party supported by a vast amount of farmers from northeast and north region. However, this electoral system still could not prevent the People Power Party (Pro-Thaksin) from obtaining ruling power and was abolished again in 2011 general election.

The Pilipino had a long history of elections dated back the earlier 20th century. From the beginning, the politics are monopolized by the elites that include big families and big land lords, and political family in different provinces of Philippine. There was always a call for ending the elite-dominated elections and politics. In two

executive elections two candidates, Joseph Ejercito Estrada in 1998 and Fernando Poe, Jr. in 2004, with entirely ordinary backgrounds were the two front runners, running against the elite background candidates.

South Korea also provides a good example to illustrate the income distribution problem. After the 1997 East Asian Financial Crisis, companies in South Korea have become less willing to hire long-term employees. Young Koreans prefer to work for the Chaebols, which provide only about 10% of jobs but offer more long-term job security. These big conglomerates gradually shifted their manufacturing lines abroad, narrowing the job market for local people, especially the young generation and forcing them to seek less secure alternatives. As we have seen in Europe over the past few years, those entering the market face the brunt of structural changes taking place in industrial economies. We see this phenomenon taking place in Northeast Asia.

Taiwan is in similar position. Mainland China on the other side of the narrow Taiwan Strait naturally provides a destination where Taiwanese companies can easily move their production lines over. The ideological clash was exacerbated by a growing tension on the island between the potential losers, namely the blue-collar workers, farmers and people who are employed in the non-tradable sector at large, and the potential winners, namely people with transportable skills and capital and people who are employed in sectors competing in the global market, in the process of cross-Strait economic integration. The former group, disproportionately concentrating in the Southern and Central part of Taiwan, provided the Pan Green with a solid political base and a perceptive audience for its Taiwanese nationalist persuasion. The later group, which concentrate in the Northern part of Taiwan and accounted for the bulk of Taiwan's economy, on the other hand, was receptive to the Pan Blue view that the

DPP's confrontational approach to cross-Strait relations would only accelerate the capital flight and brain drain and suffocate Taiwan's economic vitality.

The rising income inequality in the Northeast Asia countries is clearly driven by the world economic integration. The income inequality in the Southeast Asia is an entrenched problem. These countries still heavily rely on natural resources and agriculture, the control of the monopoly becomes the critical issue. Since the root causes are different the remedy could be rather different. The former involve distribute the benefits of free trade to those who suffer from the policy, while the latter involve breaking the monopoly and distribute the revenues of natural resources more fairly. The latter involve removing the unfair privileges. As seen the case of Thailand, the issue of income inequality could also post a threat the democracy. When the disadvantaged groups ask for equal economic rights and fair share, the fight between could be quite fierce. Eventually both sides may reach an agreement. In the process of reaching the new equilibrium, the stakes of the vested interests are so high that they have a strong incentive not to observe the democratic norms and procedures. This situation posts a threat to the new democracy.

The China Factor

First, the main political division of the countries surrounding China is highly influenced by the rise of China. This is an important issue but has not been treated well. There are already studies that explore how China's neighbors view China but few studies systematically examine how China factors trigger or aggravate the level of polarization in the neighboring countries. The social division and political competition in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, and Hong Kong are all shaped by the China factor. Does this country want to maintain a closer economic tie with

China? Does the country want to arm itself to rival the rise of Chinese military power? These are the issues that the countries surrounding China cannot avoid. The rise of China stirred up or aggravated the social cleavages and political competition. For South East Asia, the rise of China poses a threat to them, but it does not so have a bearing on their core interests and thereby does not significantly influence their domestic politics. This is essentially because there exists high-profile sovereign or territory disputes between China and its neighbors in the North East Asia countries, including Taiwan, Japan, and Hong Kong. In addition, the level of economic integration is much higher between China and the counties that belong to the confusion culture sphere.

In Japanese, whether to executive the Right of Collective Self-Defense is the major controversy. Right-wing politicians see the Right of Collective Self-Defense as the symbol of a "normal country"; besides, taking preemptive action is a more effective way to defense Japan. However, left-wing politicians perceive the Right of Collective Self-Defense as the symbol of Militarism, and they object any action that may bring Japan to war. In Korean, the main issue at stake is the North Korea problem. The conservative camp preserves the same foreign policies and economic policies as the government in authoritarian times. Its politicians incline to keep close relationship with the U.S. and keep distance from North Korea The progressive and liberal camp advocates ameliorating hostile relation between South Korea and North Korea. Although this issue does not directly link to China, it is in fact closed related to the development of China. Under the rising theme of "maintaining stability" in recent years, China is less willing to tolerant the bad behavior of North Korea. If China indeed becomes a democracy, it will have no reason to support North Korea. Moreover, the rapid growth of China provide a natural market for the its

manufacturing products, accelerating the growth of the big enterprises. This trend eventually increases the income inequality in the Korean society and the ensuring class politics.

After 2008 KMT in Taiwan sequentially introduced direct air, sea and postal links, opening the door to mainland Chinese tourists, lifting the ban on inbound investment by mainland Chinese firms, loosening the 40 per cent cap on mainland-bound investment by listed companies. As the great majority of the pan-Green supporters tend to identify themselves as Taiwanese, there is a strong sentiment among then that the acceleration of cross-Strait economic integration may compromise Taiwan's political autonomy and the country's sovereign status. The pan-Green camp felt much threatened by the political implications of the acceleration of cross-Strait economic Strait. The pan-Green politicians have tried out all kind of disruptive strategy in the legislature to block KMT government's legislative initiatives in particular over cross-Strait relations.

Based on historical experience dated back to hundreds of years, Mongolian in general is quite specious of China's influence. The two main parties do have significant attitude difference on the rise of China. In a question, the ABS III asked Mongolian "General speaking, the influence China has on our country is very positive, positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, negative, and very negative? 34.7% of the MPRP supporters reply that the influence is very positive, positive, or somewhat positive; while only 27.4% of the right wing party supporters say so. Hong Kong is another case that its relationship with Beijing occupied the newspaper in recent years. Its economy heavily relied on Mainland China but politically they seek democracy and greater extent of autonomy. The attitude gap between parties is even more clear. 94.2% of the Pro-Beijing Camp supporters reply that the influence of the

rise of China is very positive, positive, or somewhat positive, while only 34.7% of Pan-democracy Camp supporters say so.

The social divide itself does not necessarily result in fierce political antagonism. Social tension needs some organic sources to be able to ferment. The rise of China and its expansion of economic and economic influence provide just the sources. It triggered and aggravated the political antagonism in the countries surrounding him. Bandwagon or balancing became the dominant policy choice that these countries have to choose. The bandwagon option prefers to maintain a less confrontational political relationship with China and aggressively use the Chinese market. The balancing option prefer to contain the expansion of Chinese political and military forces by seeking coalition within the region or strengthen pact with the U.S., and to reduce its reliance on the Chinese market.

China is developing countries in terms of economic and political development. The pace of political development is lagged far behind the economic growth speed, though. Unless the development of China reaches the plateau, i.e., relatively matured economy and democracy, its relationship with its neighbors will not reach a stable equilibrium and the domestic political divides in the neighboring countries is likely to continue. During the process of reaching the equilibrium at certain moments, however, the tension could rise to a very high level, both between countries and within countries. The perceived stake and threats are so high that it gives both sides a strong incentive not to tolerate the argument of the other side and not to abide by the democratic procedures. This could post a serious threat to the stability and sustainability of new democracies in the region.

Winner-Loser gap

Since most of the countries in this region are hybrid regime or new democracies, there are likely to have significant attitudinal differences in democratic support and democratic values between supporters of main parties. Because of the nature of democracy and hybrid regime are rather different, we can identify two types of attitudinal gaps in hybrid regimes and in democracies. Let's first focus on attitudes toward support for democracy. In an electoral authoritarian regime, political leaders control the elections, limit the basic rights to ensure their ruling status and proclaim their political regimes democratic simultaneously.[1] On one hand, for winners, democracy is worth supporting not only because it fits official ideology but it also reflects their interests since the elections in an uneven playing field keep the ruling parties they support in power. For losers, they need democratic regime to express their political opinions and give them hope to gain their political influence, so democracy is a preferable regime choice to them. In this stage of political development, both winner and loser support democracy no matter they merely worship the "D-word" fascia or they truly understand and look forward to democratic rules. In other words, the winner-loser gap in democracy preference will not be significant in these countries.

In democracies, we also expect a negligible gap in democracy preference. Although the story is somewhat different, the attitude gap is similar. Because these countries are democracies, the pretending effect of worshiping "D-word" fascia is not present here. On the other hand, having competitive election means that it is possible for each side to win or lose the next general election. The winner has a fair chance to become loser and the loser also has a fair chance to win the next general election. Especially many countries experience party turnover at least once or even more. It

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[1] The typical instance is Singapore. Singapore has never been perceived as a liberal democracy. All Singaporean leaders have been insisting on maintaining a paternalistic political system (O'Dwyer, 2003); nevertheless, when it comes to describing the political regime of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew used the term "Singapore model of democracy" and Goh Chok Tong used the term "trustee model of democracy."(Ng, 1997)

becomes a norm that the current rule of game if well accepted. As a result, both winners and losers are willing to accept the rule of the game, i.e., democratic institution. That is why the winner-loser gap is also not significant in the democratic countries.

However, this does not mean that winner-loser gaps are totally absent in democracies. In several newly democratized countries, the former authoritarian ruling parties remain in power and are one of the dominant political forces. In other words, the dualism between the former ruling party and opposition party remain after the democratic transition. Because of pressures from within the nation or outside the nation, these parties usually passively launch democratic transitions. Therefore, being the political beneficiaries of authoritarian rules, the supporters of the parties are comparatively less supportive of democratic regime. Compare to the former winners, the former opposition parties for long push for democratization and their supports are on average more supportive of democratic regime.[2]

Next, we examine the difference in democratic values. Although the followers of the ruling party in hybrid regime endorse democracy, they do not particularly endorse liberal democratic values such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, political diversity and checks and balances than losers. It is simply because that these values may constrain the power of the ruling party which in turn harms their interests. In contrast, being the political underdogs, the opposition has stronger incentive to embrace the value of freedom of speech, freedom of association, political diversity and checks and balances and wish an independent judicial branch. As a result, the gap in democratic value between winners and losers is significant within an electoral

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[2] Anderson et al. (2005: 109) compare the winner-loser gap in regime support between old and new democracies in Western, Central and Eastern Europe and indicate that "the supporters of the old Communist parties exhibit significantly lower levels of support for the democratic system than voters for other parties, and in particular if they are not in power."

authoritarian country. The democratic-value gap essentially reflects the demand and resistance for transition from hybrid regime to democracy in these countries.

For democracies, the story is somewhat different. Building democratic institutions and having turnover experiences by definition means that the elements of freedom of speech, freedom of association, political equality, and checks and balances are in place. Failing to respect the democratic values are likely to invite series criticism and contentious reaction from the civil society. As a result, both winners and losers are willing to accept democratic values. For that reason, the winner-loser gap in regime support is in general smaller in democracies than in the hybrid regimes.

In several newly democratized countries, the former authoritarian ruling parties remain in power and are one of the dominant political forces. When the former dominant party regains political power, it sparks distrust and concerns among the supporters of the former opposition party. Especially when the former dominant party simultaneously controls the executive and the legislative branches, the supporters of the opposition are most likely to distrust the ruling party and prefer to contain the power of the government. The democratic-value gap will then merge under the circumstances.

Ethnic Heterogeneity

The level of ethnic heterogeneity is higher in South East Asia than in the North East part of Asia. Many of Southeast Asian countries have different races. More importantly there is a religious division in these countries. In there are the cleavages between secular party and non-secular parties. Religious conflicts literally took place in Thailand. In contrast, the societies of the Northeast Asian countries is either quite homogeneous or involve only sub-ethnicity like Taiwan where people share the same

culture and speak different Chinese dialects. The type of ethnic division has a bearing on kind of the institutional designs that aim at ameliorate the tension.

To avoid potential political and social conflicts, some East Asian countries designed special electoral laws. The most famous or in some sense notorious example is the special electoral system in Singapore. Singapore adopts a special electoral rule to avoid a single ethnic group, Chinese, Malay, or Indian, from monopolizing the Parliament. A majority of members of the Parliament seats was elected from the Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs). Each party has to offer a list of candidates in the GRCs, and in addition to the Chinese, at least one member of the list must be a member of the Malay, the Indian or another minority community.

Ethnic relationship is also central to Malaysia politics. Three main ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese, and Indians have their own languages, culture, and religions. The ruling party, Barisan National, believe that the current political and economic regime that restrain the freedom of speech and give Malay special economic favors is justifiable and necessary. The core member of Barisan National, UMNO, is itself a Malay-based racist party. The opposition party, People Alliance or Pakatan Rakyat, in contrast promote equality between ethnic groups and ask for the protection of the freedom of speech.

Indonesia is another important case. There are over 300 ethnic groups and over 700 different languages in Indonesia, and it also has a special electoral rule: only a political party or coalition of political parties that wins 25% of the national vote in legislative elections or wins at least 20% of DPR's 560 seats can nominate candidates for President and Vice President. It is difficult for a single party to reach this threshold since the election of the House of Representatives adopts the Open List Proportional Representation System which leads to a multi-party system in the Congress. In order

to win the presidential election, political parties have to cooperate with other parties and propose moderate policies which appeal to all ethnic groups.[3]

In Taiwan, the ethnic tension is more of a confrontation of ideologies between people of different historical experience. The social and physical differences between sub-ethnic groups are not that significant. It is rather difficult to physically identify the supporters of different sub-ethnic groups. The system it adopt aim to reward the moderate candidates seats. A Mixed-Member Electoral System was introduced to replace the Single Nontransferable Vote under Multi-member District System to prevent extreme Chinese Nationalists and Taiwanese Nationalists from entering the Legislative Yuan (Taiwanese Parliament). For Japan and Korea, the main social cleavage is issue driven but not ethnic division. There is no institutions aim at ameliorate the social tension.

The ethnic heterogeneity could hurt the prospects of democratization in some hybrid regime. From the example of Singapore and Malaysia, we find that ethnic division give the ruling parties the excuses not to democratize the existing political system. The excuses in the two countries are in Malaysia simply to protect the rights of the economic disadvantaged majority and in Singapore to maintaining social harmony.

Conclusion

In this paper we explore the factors shaping the landscape of party competition in East Asian countries. We touch the issue of income inequality, the China factor, ethnic heterogeneity, and some of the institution designs in turn. All of them trigger or aggravate the political antagonism in many countries in the region in different ways.

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[3] The partisan difference is also significant in Japan and Taiwan and partially significant in South Korea.

In the process of reaching the new equilibrium, either adjusting the relationship with China or reconfiguring the political and economic arrangements, the stakes of are so high that elites have a strong incentive not to observe the democratic norms and procedures. This situation could post a threat to the new democracy.

Table 1: Political Camps/Coalitions and Main Social Cleavages in 2010-2012

Country	Camp/Coalition	Major Ideological Difference b/w Camps	Specific Social Cleavages
Japan	LDP, New Komeito	Conservatism vs. Social Democracy	Issues of the Right of Collective Self-Defense, China policy, and Koreans in Japan
	DPJ, JCP		
Korea	GNP, LFP, FHS	Conservatism vs. Liberalism and Progressivism	Issues of North Korea policies; Economic Development vs. Wealth Distribution
	Democratic, DLP, CKP, NPP, PPP		
Taiwan	Pan-Blue (KMT, PFP, New Party)	Chinese Nationalism vs. Taiwanese Nationalism	Political and economic relationships between China and Taiwan, Class issue
	Pan-Green (DPP, TSU)		
Mongolia	DP, CGP, GP	Economic Liberalism vs. Social Democracy	Issues of Parliamentary Electoral System
	MPRP		
Philippines	Team Unity (led by LAKAS-CMD)	(Both of them are electoral alliances)	Oligarchic Elites vs. Non-Oligarchic Elites
	Genuine Opposition		
Indonesia	Democratic Party Coalition	(Both of them are electoral alliances)	Ethnic Diversity and Regional Variation
	Ten-Party Coalition		
Thailand	Anti-Thaksin Camp (Democrat)	Conservatism vs. Left-wing Populism	Rural Farmers vs. Urban Middle Classes; Issues of Patani Region
	Pro-Thaksin Camp (PPP)		
Malaysia	BN (Barisan National)	Malayan Nationalism vs. Social Liberalism	Issues of Equality between Ethnic Groups and Fairness of Election
	PR (People Alliance)		
Singapore	People's Action Party	Pragmatism vs. Social Democracy	Fairness of Elections and Democratization
	Oppositions (Worker's Party)		
Cambodia	Cambodian People's Party	no specific ideology vs. Liberalism	Fairness of Elections and Democratization
	Oppositions (Sam Rainsy Party)		

Hong Kong	Pro-Beijing	Chinese Nationalism, Conservatism vs. Liberalism	Issues of Double General Election and Economic relationships with China
	Pan-Democracy		
Vietnam	Communist Party of Vietnam	Marxism–Leninism	Political and Economic Reform